

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 4071

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PDEV KS KN

SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER CHARGES NORTH POISED FOR WAR

1. KOREAN PRESS HAS GIVEN FRONT PAGE MAJOR HEADLINES TO DEFENSE MINISTER SUH JYONG-CHUL'S JUNE 24 PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENTS THAT NORTH KOREA IS ENGAGED IN RAPID MILITARY BUILD-UP AND IS POISED FOR OPPORTUNITY TO REINVADE SOUTH KOREA. IN HIS OPENING STATEMENT TO REPORTERS, AT CONFERENCE ON EVE OF 24TH ANNIVERSARY OF KOREAN WAR, SUH NOTED FAILURE OF NORTH TO ACCEPT PRESIDENT PARK'S RECENT PEACE OVERTURES, THEN SAID: "A LOOK AT THE NORTH KOREAN MILITARY TREND FOR THE PAST ONE AND A HALF YEARS SUFFICIENTLY INDICATES HOW FRANTIC NORTH KOREA IS IN SEEKING THE CHANCE OF REAGGRESSION AND IN PREPARING FOR A WAR."

2. STATEMENT CHARGES THAT DURING THIS PERIOD NORTH HAS UNILATERALLY SUPENDED SOUTH-NORTH KIALOGUE AND WARNS THAT NORTH IS WAITING FOR DECISIVE MOMENT WHEN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL CONFUSION PREVAILS AND GOVERNMENT IS PARALYZED, NORTH-SOUTH MILITARY BALANCE IS UPSET, OR INTERNATIONAL SITUATION TURNS IN FAVOR NORTH KOREA. MORE SPECIFICALLY SUH'S
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MESSAGE CLAIMS THAT IN YEAR AND A HALF NORTH HAS:

-- INTRODUCED SUBMARINES, DESTROYERS, TORPEDO BOATS, AND MISSILE CARRYING FAST BOATS, WHILE ACTIVATING A FLEET COMMAND ON THE WEST COAST WITH FLEETS DEPLOYED ON THE EAST AND WEST COAST.

-- UPGRADED A NUMBER OF BRIGADES TO DIVISIONS AND ACTIVATED LIGHT INFANTRY BRIGADES.

-- ADDED SOVIET-MADE FROG-5 MISSILES, 70 AMPHIBIOUS CRAFT, 90 MIG FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, AND 100 AN-2 AIRCRAFT.

-- CONDUCTED LARGE SCALE EXERCISES DURING SOUTH KOREAN CAMPUS OUTBREAKS TOWARD END 1973.

-- MOVED FROGS TO PANMUNJOM AREA AND EXPANDED FORWARD AIRSTRIPS AT KOKSAN AND HAEJU MAKING THEM FULLY "OPERATIONAL COMBAT AIRFIELDS."

-- THREATENED FIVE NORTHWEST ISLANDS CREATING A "TOUCH AND GO SITUATION."

-- INFILTRATED IN PAST SIX MONTHS 46 ARMED OR UNARMED AGENTS IN 14 INSTANCES.

3. EXPANDING SOMEWHAT ON MINISTER'S STATEMENT, GOVERNMENT ENGLISH-LANGUAGE KOREAN HERALD REFERS TO NORTH'S "DRASTICALLY UPGRADED" PREPAREDNESS AND POSSIBILITY OF NORTH USING AIRFIELDS HAVING UNDERGROUND SHELTERS RECENTLY CONSTRUCTED NEAR HAEJU AND KOKSAN FOR AIRBORNE SURPRISE ATTACKS. CAPTION ON HERALD PICTURE OF MIG-21S SAYS NORTH HAS 130 OF THESE AIRCRAFT AND MORE THAN 400 OLDER TYPE MIGS. PAPERS ALSO CARRYING DETAILED ARTICLES DESCRIBING NORTH KOREAN MILITARY STRENGTH AND EDITORIALS DECRYING NORTHERN EFFORTS.

4. COMMENT: SUH'S SPECIFIC CLAIMS REGARDING THE NORTHERN MILITARY BUILD-UP, WHICH ARE MUCH MORE SPECIFIC THAN PREVIOUS SIMILAR CLAIMS BY ROKG LEADERS, ARE SUBSTANTIALLY ACCURATE. THE DEVELOPMENTS HE CITES CONFIDENTIAL

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HOWEVER, ARE PART OF THE LONG-TERM STEADY INCREASE IN NORTH KOREAN CAPABILITY THAT HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR YEARS, NOT A SUDDEN PRECIPITOUS BUILD-UP OVER THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF. UNLIKE SUH WE STILL SEE NOTHING "FRANTIC" IN RECENT DEVELOPMENTS NORTH OF THE ARMISTICE LINE. WE SEE NO INDICATION OF AN UPSURGE IN THE RATE OF THE NORTH'S BUILD-UP, NOR DO WE PERCEIVE INDICATIONS THAT NORTHERN IMPROVEMENT IN MILITARY STRENGTH IS

SPECIFICALLY GEARED TO RECENT EVENTS IN THE SOUTH.
IN SUM, THE SENSE OF ALARM CONVEYED BY SUH'S STATEMENTS
DO NOT ACCORD WITH THE REALITIES AS WE SEE THEM; RATHER
IT APPEARS DESIGNED TO JUSTIFY CONTINUATION OF
PRESIDENT PARK'S HARD-LINE DOMESTIC POLICIES. TO SUSTAIN
A STRONG ANTI-COMMUNIST SPIRIT IN THE SOUTH AND TO
DEMONSTRATE ROKG RESOLVE TO PYONGYANG.
HABIB

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